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Jennifer Katherine Shields
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Ref: H201603018

Dear Jennifer

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request of 25 July 2016 for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), as follows:

I am writing to request an update on the status of the waitlist for Gender Confirmation Surgery for transgender patients. Namely: the length of the waitlist now; when you expect to resume surgeries, or when you expect to confirm an overseas provider for male to female GRS - something that was due to happen last year; how often you intend to send patients for surgery once they resume, keeping in mind that the last waitlist estimation was 40 years long; and any communications within and from/to the Ministry about both the status of the waitlist and the process of finding a surgeon to continue surgeries.

I note your earlier OIA request (dated 24 September 2015) and the Ministry's response to this (dated 13 October 2015). I will provide an update since then, under the separate topics you have identified.

Length of the waiting list

There are currently 71 people waiting for male to female gender reassignment surgery (GRS) and 17 people waiting for female to male surgery.

When male to female surgeries are expected to resume

The process for resuming male to female surgeries began in April 2016. The referring District Health Board (DHB) specialists of the four individuals at the top of the list were contacted by email, in order to request that they initiate the process of sending the people overseas for surgery. Attachment 1 gives an example of the email that was sent to all four specialists. I have withheld personal identification of the individual involved, under Section 9(2)(a) of the Act, in order to protect their privacy.

After some consideration, two of the four individuals declined the surgery. The next two individuals on the list have therefore been selected for surgery overseas.

We are shortly to receive the completed application forms for the first two individuals. The other two applications are not yet ready for submission. As soon as the applications have been reviewed and approved, the individuals will be able to go overseas for surgery.

When an overseas provider for male to female GRS is expected to be confirmed

As you were advised in the response to your previous OIA request, it is the responsibility of DHB specialists to identify overseas providers for the individuals that they refer overseas. We had hoped that it might be possible to identify a 'preferred provider' for New Zealand for this surgery, but so far the DHB specialists have wished to make their own referrals to overseas surgeons, in consultation with their patients.

How often patients will be sent overseas once surgery is resumed

The rate of male to female surgery will continue at the level of 3 surgeries every two years.

Once the surgery for the currently selected four individuals has been completed, then the surgery rate for the last few years will be reviewed, in order to identify whether a 'catch-up' is required, in order to compensate for the time when there has been no surgery.

Communications about (a) the status of the waiting list and (b) the process of finding a surgeon to continue surgeries

(a) Attachment 2 is a Health Report to the Minister of Health about a submission to the Parliamentary Health Select Committee from the Ministry with regard to gender reassignment services.

(b) Attachment 3 is correspondence between the Ministry and the New Zealand Association of Plastic Surgeons, about the possibility of a training fellowship for gender reassignment surgery. It includes three letters. Attachment 4 is all internal Ministry emails related to this issue.

I trust this information fulfils your request. You have the right, under section 28 of the Act, to ask the Ombudsman to review my decision to withhold certain information under this request.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andrew Simpson
Acting Chief Medical Officer
Office of the Chief Medical Officer